

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ADDIS 03087 151528Z

44

ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 AID-05 PC-01 SSO-00 NSCE-00

USIE-00 INRE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07

L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 OPR-02

A-01 SY-05 OC-05 CCO-00 OMB-01 SCS-03 SCA-01 SCCT-01

EB-07 /089 W

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O 151436Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 3661

AMCONGEN ASMARA IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

AMEMBASSY PARIS

USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L ADDIS ABABA 3087

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS ET

SUBJECT: LALIBELA SITUATION: SITREP AFTERNOON MARCH 15

REF: ADDIS 3080 AND 3074

1. NEITHER EAL NOR CHOPPERS ABLE TO PROCEED INTO LALIBELA. EPMG DECLINED PERMIT THEM TO GO UNTIL DIRG AUTHORIZATION RECEIVED AND IT STILL UNAVAILABLE AT THIS WRITING (1700 HOURS LOCAL).

2. EMBASSY REMAINED IN TOUCH WITH LALIBELA AMCITS UNTIL 1550 HRS. WE RELAYED TO MOD, C/S AND ACTING FONMIN AMCITS' REPORTS OF SITUATION. THIS INCLUDED "GUARANTEE" OFFERED BY INSURGENT LEADER THAT ANY HELICOPTER WOULD BE PERMITTED LAND AND LEAVE, REPEATEDLY IF NECESSARY, IN
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PAGE 02 ADDIS 03087 151528Z

FRONT OF HOTEL TO EVACUATE WOUNDED FLIGHT ATTENDANT AND FOREIGNERS,

PROVIDED ONLY IT ARRIVED "EMPTY". HOWEVER, EPMG AUTHORITIES CLEARLY CONCERNED LEST THIS GUARANTEE PROVE WORTHLESS.

3. AT APPROX. 1245 HRS INSURGENTS INFORMED AMCITS THAT ABOVE-CITED GUARANTEE WOULD RUN OUT AT 1545 HRS AND THIS TOO PASSED EPMG AUTHORITIES INCLUDING ACTING FONMIN.

4. WHEN DECISION ON CHOPPERS STILL NOT FORTHCOMING AT 1445 HRS., CHARGE HAD PERSONAL RADIOCON WITH AIDOFF TED MORSE WHO MADE FOLLOWING POINTS:

(A) SITUATION DETERIORATING IN LALIBELA AND IT THEREFORE UNANIMOUS CONCLUSION OF AMERICANS THEY BETTER OFF ON ROAD THAN IN HOTEL.

(B) AMERICANS IN PROCESS ASSEMBLING 5-6 VEHICLE CONVOY. THEY EXPECTED HAVE ENOUGH FUEL TO MAKE KOBO (ON DESSIE ROAD) CAMPING ENROUTE IF NECESSARY.

(C) AID AIRCRAFT SHOULD BE SENT LOOK FOR THEM AND AID TOYOTA LAND-ROVER FROM DESSIE TO MEET THEM IN KOBO. IT WAS AGREED THAT, IN CIRCUMSTANCES, JUDGEMENT ON NEXT STEPS BEST MADE IN FIELD AND, ACCORDINGLY, CONVOY FORMED AND DEPARTED HOTEL AT 1550 HRS. LOCAL.

5. AT 1615 ACTING FONMIN INFORMED US THAT DIRG STILL DELIBERATING AND THOUGHT MEANWHILE IT BEST FOR AMCITS TO STANDFAST IN HOTEL.

ACTING FONMIN WAS ADVISED THAT SITUATION HAD NOT PERMITTED FURTHER DELAY AND PARTY NOW ENROUTE TO KOBO. DIRG MIGHT BE ASKED CONSIDER SENDING CHOPPER TO KOBO FROM WHICH IT COULD PERHAPS SCOUT PARTY'S PROGRESS AND POSSIBLY EVACUATE MEMBERS THEREOF FROM ROAD WHERE THIS FEASIBLE. ACTING FONMIN PROMISED CONVEY THIS THOUGHT TO DIRG.

6. EAL'S SENIOR AMERICAN ADVISER REQUESTED DESPATCH OF EAL CHOPPER FROM KOMBOLCHA TO KOBO AND WE UNDERSTAND IT WILL ARRIVE THERE O/A 1730 HRS. LOCAL TODAY.

7. COMMENT: LOOTING OF HOTEL BY INSURGENTS REPORTEDLY BEGAN SHORTLY PRIOR DEPARTURE OF AMCITS. INSURGENTS HAVE, WE ARE TOLD, "CUT" EXTREMELY DIFFICULT ROAD WHICH LEADS FROM LALIBELA OUT TO KOBO. IF "CUT" IS PROFESSIONAL JOB INTENDED KEEP ARMY OUT OF LALIBELA -- AND IT MAY WELL BE -- THEN OUR PEOPLE MAY HAVE TO TURN BACK. GIVEN EFFERVESCENCE IN AREA, "GO" DECISION NOT CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 ADDIS 03087 151528Z

REACHED LIGHTLY AND ALL CONCERNED FULLY AWARE IT COMPORTS RISKS. ALL AMERICAN, IN CONVOY. CONVOY ALSO CARRYING WOUNDED EAL FLIGHT ATTENDANT WHO STILL HANGING ON AND USAID (ETHIOPIAN) SECRETARY MELKE TADESSE. EVEN IF TRIP TO KOBO UNEVENTFUL IT COULD TAKE GROUP ALL DAY TOMORROW - OR LONGER- TO REACH IT.
WYMAN

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PARAMILITARY FORCES, AIRPORTS, LOOTING, COMBAT OPERATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 15 MAR 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: buchantr
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975ADDIS03087
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750091-0668
From: ADDIS ABABA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750347/aaaabqlx.tel
Line Count: 114
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 ADDIS 3080, 75 AND 3074
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: buchantr
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 20 MAY 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <20 MAY 2003 by ElyME>; APPROVED <08 OCT 2003 by buchantr>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: LALIBELA SITUATION: SITREP AFTERNOON MARCH 15
TAGS: PINS, ET, LALIBELA
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006